

A CRITICAL
EXAMINATION

OF THE
ASSEMBLY'S CATECHISMS,
CONFESSION of FAITH, &c.

IN WHICH

Some ERRORS are Exposed and Confuted by
SCRIPTURE and REASON,

AND THE

MORAL CHARACTER of GOD
Vindicated from the Injurious Consequences
usually drawn from those Premises.

IN A

LITERARY CORRESPONDENCE
between TWO FRIENDS.

By SAM. PARVISH.

L O N D O N :

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EXAMINATION
OF THE
COMMISSIONERS OF THE
LAND OFFICE
IN THE
YEAR 1860
AND
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TO THE
READER.

THOUGH the Doctrine exposed in the following Pages, (injurious to the Honour of God and the Peace of Men) seems near expiring; yet, as some extraordinary Efforts have been lately made to revive, and re-establish the same; I hope I may be allowed to publish the Recipe by which, in some Measure; I was relieved from the Malignity I sucked in very early; the Effects of which I felt severely in riper Life.

As to the Performance, which cost me some Pains to collect and digest; if it will not plead its own Cause, I am not concerned for its Success: And I shall only add, that it was honestly intended, and according to my Ability fairly executed.



T O

My Very GOOD FRIEND C. L.
in L O N D O N.

S I R,

YOURS of the 5th Instant, kind, tho' severe, merits my Acknowledgments. In Return, I own that, as to the Assembly's Confession of Faith, larger and shorter Catechisms, my Sentiments are very different from what they formerly were. Whether I have now a better Discernment, or am, as you express it, under great Delusion, you may better judge when we shall have finished our proposed literary Correspondence on that Subject, and you shall have heard the Motives which have produced the Alteration.

You charge this to my 'Remissness in waiting at the
'Throne of Grace for Illumination, and my Wantonness
'in trusting to my own Understanding, when the Way to
'Truth and eternal Life is so fairly exhibited in the Scrip-
'tures, and those excellent Tracts abovementioned.'

God having made the Perceptions of Men different, the same Care and Industry does not always produce an Agreement in Sentiment: He who knows our Frame, will, I doubt not, accept our sincere Endeavours, however weak our Capacities, or small our Improvement.

I shall take the Liberty to make Remarks on some Parts of the Works of those Divines, whose Capacity and Sincerity you so much applaud.

I observe, in general, they were formed agreeable to the then Mode of Divinity in this Nation.

It may not be amiss to observe how hard it is to remove vulgar Prejudices. When the *Romish* Church-tyranny (that Yoak which our Fathers were not able to bear) with its Rubbish

Rubbish of Creeds and Worship, was in a good Measure removed, and a more free Way of Enquiry was indulged, and another System established, the People in Time grew as fond of their new, as they had been of the preceding.

Religion, like other Things, is subject to vary in its Mode.

In this, every Society is, or ought to be free, and every Person ought to have Liberty to express his own Sentiments, and every Restraint is an Act of Tyranny over the Consciences of Mankind. Whether or no there had been an undue Exercise of the new Church-Power under Queen *Elizabeth*, King *James*, and *Charles* the First, it is not to my present Purpose to examine.

However, in the last of those Reigns, Arminianism spread itself under the Patronage of some Prelates; and when those Prelates, with their Monarch and Church-Establishment, sunk under the Weight of Opposition, the *Calvinists* Principles rose with new Vigour.

This appeared by the Resolutions and Acts of the Assembly of Divines, summoned to sit at *Westminster* 1643. This Work is the Subject of our present Inquiry and Examination.

I think the Confession of Faith, and the larger and shorter Catechisms, contain much that appears unworthy of, and a Reproach to God; and that very many of the Texts of Scripture, brought to confirm Positions there laid down, are foreign to the Design for which they are quoted.

You are pleased to call the shorter Catechism an excellent Form of sound Words.

I shall pass by some Things of less Moment, while I object against those of greater.

The second Answer in that Catechism: *The Word of God (which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament) is the only Rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.* Surely we must allow the Almighty to be the common Parent of Mankind.

Compare the few, only *Jews* and *Christians*, who have that Rule, with the very great Numbers who have not, shall we conclude that he has left almost all the World, without any Rule in their most momentous Concerns? God forbid.

Suppose the Scriptures to be as good a Rule as you please, and those as highly favoured who enjoy it, is it the only one?

I could

I could quote much from the Book you boast of to the Purpose, but shall content myself, and I hope you also, with one Passage from St. Paul to the Romans, ii. 14, 15. *For the Gentiles which have not the Law, by which I understand the Scriptures, so far as then written, do by Nature the Things contained in the Law; these having not the Law, are a Law unto themselves, which shew the Work of the Law written in their Hearts.* 'Twas there written; If it was a Law, was it not a Rule? If the Law of Reason was a Rule, where the Scriptures were not exhibited or received, then the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are not the only Rule to direct us.

As to the Fourth, I can conceive of an all-perfect Being, that he is unchangeable; and that the one Eternal is all Perfection.

Also, agreeable to the Fifth, that there is but one God. I think the Words *Living and True* are superfluous. I fear I have tired your Patience by my first long Letter.

Exon,
March 16, 1749-50.

I conclude, Yours, &c.

T. W.

To Mr. T. W. in Exon.

My Dear Friend,

Compelled by warm Compassion for your precious Soul, as perverted from the good old Path, and in imminent Danger of Destruction, I enter into this literary Correspondence with you; and Oh! that I may be so happy as to reclaim and restore you:

Paul may plant, and Apollo water, &c.

I received your Answer to my first, and find by it, that you have not commenced a professed Atheist, which I fear may be in Time the Consequence of leaning too much to your own Understanding. The Rule is, To the Law, and to the Testimony!

The few Remarks you have yet made on that excellent Sum of Christian Divinity, the Assembly's shorter Catechism, I shall pass by, as Matters of less Moment than some of the following: You believe a God; you do well; but remember your Salvation depends on believing rightly of that Being, and conforming to his Word.

The

The Sixth Article is, that *there are three Persons in the God-head; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in Substance, equal in Power and Glory.* Proved by *Math. xxviii. 19. — 1 John v. 7.*

The larger Catechism adds to the Words *One God*, that of *Eternal, &c. altho' distinguished by their personal Properties, which are; It is proper to the Father to beget the Son, and to the Son to be begotten of the Father, and to the Holy Ghost to proceed from the Father and the Son from all Eternity.* Also in the Confession of Faith, *In the Unity of the God-head there be three Persons of one Substance, Power and Eternity; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy-Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally, begotten of the Father; the Holy-Ghost, eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.* All this, proved by a great Number of Scriptures, which I leave you to read, and judge how fit they are to prove this stupendous Mystery.

London,
March 25, 1750.

I am, S I R, &c.

C. L.

S I R,

I Received your compassionate Letter, for which I return you as under. However I may in Opinion differ from you, 'tis what I can no Way avoid. As the State of the Case appears, so will the Determination of the Judgment be. I cannot perceive the Truth to be on your Side the Point, from what you have produced.

I am, on the other Hand, persuaded, that not one of the Texts you quote contains any thing to your Point, but just the contrary, when the Scope and Sense of the Context is taken in.

I cannot conceive of an eternal Begetter, eternally begotten, and an eternally Proceeding, without Priority and Posteriority, Supremacy and Subordination. Nor can I to the Notion of Infinite, add a Sameness of Substance.

Must not the Begetter exist before the Begotten? Must not the Begotten and Begetter exist before the Proceeding with the others could constitute one Triune, undivided, co-equal, co-essential, co-eternal God? I shall at this Time only recommend to your Consideration two Texts of Scripture, which I think will put the Point in Debate beyond all Contradiction.

John

John xiv. 28. *My Father is greater than I.* — Mark xiii. 32. *But of that Day knoweth no Man; no, not the Angels which are in Heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.*

Exon,
April 4, 1750.

I am, S I R, &c.

T. W.

S I R,

THE Texts you quote were spoken of the Human Nature of *Jesus Christ*, and will bear the following Paraphrase:

As if our Lord had said, The Decree is fix'd, and will in the determinate Time be executed: But that Time is a Secret, lodged only in the Breast of the Omniscient; it is not communicated to any of the brightest Intelligences which surround the Throne above, much less to any Man, no not even to my Humanity.

The hypostatic Union did not exalt the Human Nature into the Divine, but joined it with the Divine. As God, *Jesus Christ* knew all Things, being perfect God; as Man, he took our Infirmities, and was perfect Man. Perfect God and perfect Man in one Person; therefore no Impeachment of the Perfection of his Human Nature, that to it was not communicated, even the perfect Knowledge of the Divine.

I am, S I R, Yours, &c.

London, April 15, 1750.

C. L.

S I R,

WHEN *Jesus Christ* speaks of *The Son*, he speaks of himself as the whole Person, as appears from the History of his Life; nor can we suppose, that, in a Being composed of God and Man, that Deity can be eclipsed by the Human Nature; such a Supposition would, I presume, be thought absurd and blasphemous. When he speaks of himself as the *Son* by way of Eminence, must he not be supposed to include the most exalted Part of his conjunct Nature, as being the eternally-begotten; co-equal, co-essential God? If he did intend his whole Self by the Word *Son*, it must, in this Place, infer Superiority in the Father; since the Father knew what the Son knew not.

A Person suppose, who has two Eyes, one by which he had a clear and perfect Sight, and one clouded by some Ob-

B

struction,

struction, by which he could not discern Objects in so perfect a Manner; should such a Person shut his best Eye, and say he could not perceive a certain Object, when he only chose not to see it, and therefore shut the Eye by which he could have seen the Object, and concealed the Truth under this secret Reservation, (*viz.*) I mean I cannot see it with my clouded Eye: I ask what we should judge of such a Man in such a Case?

Besides, the Gradation of the Sentence speaks on my Side; the Words are from the lower Rank of Beings; *but of that Day knoweth no Man; no, not the Angels which are in Heaven;* Beings of higher Rank than Man; *neither the Son,* a Being higher than Angels; *but the Father,* the highest of all, the only Omniscient! Had *Jesús Christ* intended the Human Nature, that was not above the Angelic. I shall only subscribe myself, &c.

Exon, April 26, 1750.

T. W.

S I R,

I Received yours of the 26th of April; I could have replied on the Foot of Mysteries, but that would lead us out of the Way of our present Enquiry. I shall next mention the seventh Question in the shorter Catechism. Rightly to understand the Answer to this Question, *What are the Decrees of God?* would be of great Service in the Religion of our Lord, true Christianity. The Answer is, *The Decrees of God are his eternal Purpose, according to the Counsel of his own Will; whereby, for his own Glory, he hath fore-ordained whatever comes to pass.* — This is proved by Eph. i. 11, 12. *Being predestinated according to the Purpose of him who worketh or directeth ALL THINGS after the Counsel of his own Will, &c.* N. B. ALL THINGS, from the Powers and Dominions above, to the meanest Worm, Insect, or Atom: Not a Dust in the beaten Road but has its Rise and Fall decreed from all Eternity.

These Decrees lay only in the divine Mind, till their Execution began in the Work of Creation, and will continue by his Providence; whatever has been, is, or shall be to Eternity, are but the Expression or Manifestation of what in Embrio was fore-known, and from Eternity pre-ordained by God.

What is intended by the Work of Creation is in the Ninth Answer expressed; *God's making all Things of nothing;* and

and the Works of Providence in the Eleventh Article, *are his most holy, wise, and powerful Preserving and Governing all his Creatures, and all their Actions.* As the Creature Man is to be the Subject of our Correspondence, you will excuse my altering the Series of the Articles, as they stand in the Catechism, and consider the Tenth after the Eleventh.—*God created Man, Male and Female, after his own Image, in Knowledge, Righteousness, and Holiness, &c.* God's Work of Creation was immediately succeeded by the Work of Providence.

As Man was made with Capacities superior to the other Parts of this lower Creation, 'tis questioned in the 12th Article, *What special Act of Providence did God exercise towards Man, in the Estate wherein he was created?* The Answer is, *When God had created Man, he entered into a Covenant of Life with him, upon Condition of perfect Obedience, forbidding him to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, upon Pain of Death.*

This is the Covenant of Works: Keep this and live; break it and die. But alas! *our first Parents fell from the Estate wherein they were created, by sinning against God; that is, they broke the Covenant, they eat of the Tree; the fatal Consequence is expressed in Article 16. The Covenant being made with Adam, not only for himself but for his Posterity, all Mankind descending from him by ordinary Generation, sinned in him, and fell with him in the first Transgression.* The 17th Article lets us know into what a deplorable State the Fall brought Mankind, viz. *an Estate of Sin and Misery.* The 18th Article expresses the Sinfulness of that Estate into which Man fell.—*The Guilt of Adam's first Sin, Want of original Righteousness, and the Corruption of his own Nature, which is commonly called Original Sin, together with all actual Transgressions which proceed from it.* The Misery of that Estate into which Man fell, is expressed in the 19th Article, and that Misery is very deplorable. *Mankind, by the Fall, first lost Communion with God; secondly, are under his Wrath and Curse; and so, consequently, made liable to all the Miseries in this Life, to Death itself, and to the Pains of Hell for ever.* But God did not leave ALL Mankind to perish in this State of Sin and Misery; but, *having out of his mere good Pleasure, not that he was under any Obligation so to do, from all Eternity elected some to everlasting Life, did enter into another Covenant, the first being broken, a Cove-*

nant of Grace, to deliver them out of the Estate of Sin and Misery, and to bring them into an Estate of Salvation by a Redeemer. None but these happy Few shall be Vessels of Mercy, the rest left to the Curse under which they fell, without any Possibility of Salvation.—But having exceeded the Bounds of an ordinary Letter, and fearing to lose the Time of the Post, subscribe myself,

Yours, &c.

London, May 1, 1750.

C. L.

S I R,

I Received yours of May 1. According to the System of Divinity exhibited by many Divines, the Part respecting the Decrees of God gives a most shocking Idea of the Sovereign of the World. If their Representation of his Dealings with his poor Creatures is true, well might Moses say of him in *Deuteronomy* iv. 24. *For the Lord thy God is a consuming Fire, even a jealous God!* A Being of extensive Severity in Proportion to his Mercy. I take you to be a fair Antagonist, therefore desire you to describe that Series of his Justice and Mercy towards the whole Race of Mankind, agreeable to what is laid down in the Assembly's Confession of Faith, larger and shorter Catechisms, and the Writings of some other Divines.

I am, Yours,

Exon, May 13, 1750,

T. W.

S I R,

I Am ready to satisfy your Request, but desire to settle the Sense of one Term first, viz. the Word *Grace*; that we may not use it in a Sense contrary or doubtful to each other. Sometimes 'tis used to signify Beauty, Ornament, Comeliness, or Order, and sometimes Favour bestowed; the last is the Sense in which I shall use it.

The Grace or Favour of God, is divided into Common and Special.

Common Grace is that which is dispensed alike to Elect and Reprobate; the Special, only to God's peculiar ones. This Case cannot be certainly known from the other, but sometimes by the happy Subjects to whom the *Spirit of God beareth Witness with their Spirits, that they are the Lord's*. Such sometimes feel the Manifestation of this in their own Breasts. As for others, *No Man knoweth Love or Hatred, by all that is before them; for he maketh his Sun to rise on the Evil*

Evil and the Good. All worldly Grace, &c. has nothing distinguishing in it in Appearance; tho' indeed the common Favours bestowed on the Reprobate shall contribute to make the Weight of their Damnation more heavy; especially those Common Graces of a Spiritual Kind; as,

1.] Restraining, or preventing Grace, which is shewn when Persons are running into great and dangerous Evils, God, by some Work on the Heart, or by his Providence, prevents or hinders them in their Course.

2.] Another General or Common Grace, is an Illumination of the Mind in Spiritual Things. In this many Reprobates may exceed many who are elected.

3.] Penitence and Sorrow for past Sins, and Resolutions of better Obedience, and these to a very great Degree.

4.] Delight in the Ways of God, and Zeal for his Honour, even to exposing themselves to Sufferings and Death, in the Cause of God and his Religion. These may be said to be not far from the *Kingdom of Heaven*. All this will be ineffectual to the Reprobate; but improve to special and saving Grace in the Elect.

I should mention some of those special and saving Graces to which the Reprobate shall never attain, as their destin'd End is eternal Damnation; God hides from, or prevents them from laying hold of the Means of Salvation, for the Praise of his glorious Justice and vindictive Vengeance.

But these will fall under the Description of the Method or Chain of Causes and Effects of Salvation and Damnation: I shall leave it to my next. I am at present,

London, May 24, 1750.

Yours, C. L.

S I R,

I Received yours of the 24th Instant, and wait your next with Impatience, and then shall take the Freedom to make what Remarks I think proper. I give you the Trouble of this, only to acquaint you that yours came to Hand.

Exon,

I am, S I R, &c.

May 31, 1750.

T. W.

S I R,

As we are engaged in a Debate of the greatest Weight, in which the Vindication of the divine Conduct towards all his rational Creatures is to be attempted, I shall proceed with great Caution, and on good Authority.

I shall

I shall shew the Chain of Causes and Effects one End of which we shall find in the Cabinet of Heaven, which thro' Intermediate Gradations shall extend to the endless Ages of Eternity.

The first Cause of all Things, consisting of
 1. *God.* three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, of whom we have treated on the Sixth Question of the Catechism. From him proceeds,

All Things whatsoever will; or whatsoever shall come to pass; which, with Regard to Man, is divided into two Parts.
 2. *Fore-knowledge and Decree.*

1. Decree of Election.
 2. Decree of Reprobation, and this before Men or Angels were created; by this the first, middle, and final State of Men are determinately and unchangeably fix'd, for the Glory of God's Grace and Justice.

When the Decrees of God were so far unfolded, then the proper Subject appeared on the Stage of the World. In this there was no Difference, Elect and Reprobate both alike created.

All *Adam's* Posterity involved in the
 4. *Fall of Adam.* Guilt of the first Transgression; the Consequence of which was,

Even to this Link of the Chain, no
 5. *State of Unbelief.* Marks of God's Wrath or Favour appeared distinguishable.

But in the next Stage of Descent, the Execution of the Decrees of God, a vast Difference is made, tho' clouded from mortal View, *Election* and *Reprobation*, between which the Great Gulph of eternal irrevocable Decree is fix'd. Now the happy and unhappy Subjects of Election and Reprobation, are never to meet again. In this may be applied the Words of *Abraham* to the rich Man, *Those who would pass from hence to you cannot.* I shall first pursue the Chain of Causes thro' Election to Salvation or Glorification, and afterwards through Reprobation to Damnation.

From hence all the happy Consequences,
 6. *Election.* which I can no way so well express, as in the

Words of the Assembly of Divines Confession of Faith, Chap. iii. Sect. 5. *Those of Mankind that are predestinated unto Life, God, before the Foundation of the World was laid, according to his eternal and immutable Purpose, and secret Council, and good Pleasure, of his Will, hath chosen in Christ*

Christ unto everlasting Glory, out of his meer Grace and Love, without any Foresight of Faith or good Works, or Perseverance in either of them, or any other Thing in the Creature, as Conditions or Causes moving him thereunto, and All to the Praise of his glorious Grace.

Our first Parents, at their Creation, having covenanted for themselves and their Posterity, on Terms of perfect Obedience, on their Forfeiture they were exposed to the Wrath of God, whose strict Justice rendered their Recovery impossible, had not infinite Wisdom, on the Fall, contrived a Way wherein God might be just, and yet a Justifier of those who had been Transgressors. The three Persons in the Blessed Trinity, each on his own Part, and jointly together, agreed to choose some of the lost Race, and make them Vessels of Mercy. The Father agreed to send the Son, and accept of his Sacrifice for the Sins of the Elect. The Son agreed to take upon him the Office of Mediator, and to suffer in the same Nature, and for the Sake of the Elect. The Holy Ghost, on his Part, agreed to call, sanctify, and prepare the Heirs of Salvation.

Jesus Christ became the procuring Cause of Man's Redemption. I shall give you a short View of some of the subordinate Causes, or the Means by which the great Procuring Cause operates.

1st, By the Holiness of his Manhood performing the Law.

2^{dly}, By his Sufferings and Death, paying the Price of our Ransom.

3^{dly}, By being subjected to the Grave as a Prison.

4^{thly}, By his Resurrection, as a Token of his being set free on Payment of the Debt.

5^{thly}, By his Assention to the Father, in Proof of his Acceptance with the Father.

6^{thly}, By his sitting at the Right-hand, partaking of the Father's Glory, and as our Advocate, making continual Intercession for the Elect.

I shall next proceed to the efficient Causes of Salvation of the Elect.

The next is, as in the Margin. This, according to the Assembly's Catechism, *The Work of 7. Effectual God's Spirit, whereby convincing us of our Calling. Sin and Misery, enlightening our Minds in the Knowledge of Christ, and renewing our Wills ; He, the Holy Spirit,*

Spirit, doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the Gospel. This is the first Evidence or Proof the Elect Soul can have of God's Love. The Person who is effectually called, and keeps alive the Sense of that Holy Calling, can look back, and see himself enrolled in the Book of God's Election; written before the Foundations of the World were laid: He can look forward, as being fully assured that he shall walk the Golden Streets of the *New Jerusalem*; being as sure of Eternal Glory as if he were in actual Possession of it, and stood immediately before the Throne of God.

Those who are effectually called, do in this Life partake of several Benefits, three of which are expressed in the Assembly's Catechism; the first of which makes the eighth Link of the Chain.

This to the happy Subject is an Act of Grace or Pardon for all Sins, past, present, or to come, in and thro' Jesus Christ. Such an one, notwithstanding he may have many Infirmities, and fall into great and enormous Sins, as has been the Case with many of God's Chosen Ones, yet he may boldly challenge with the Apostle, *Rom. viii. 33. Who shall lay any thing to the Charge of God's Elect?* &c. Glorious Privilege of the Sons of God! By this being free from all Charges that the Justice of God, or Censures of Men or Devils can lay against him, he is no longer an Alien, but by the next Privilege, which makes the ninth

9. *Adoption.* Link in the Order of Causes, and is, *An Act of God's Free Grace, whereby we are received into the Number, and have a Right to all the Privileges of the Sons of God, and become Heirs of God, and Joint-Heirs with Christ, Rom. viii. 17.*

A tenth Link in the Order is Sanctification, which is a
 10. *Sancti-* *Work of God's Spirit, whereby we are renewed*
fication. *in the whole Man, after the Image of God, and*
are enabled more and more to die unto Sin, and
live unto Righteousness. To these inestimable Privileges may be added, as in the 36th Answer and the Catechism, *The Benefits which in this Life do accompany, or flow from Justification, Adoption, and Sanctification; are, Assurance of God's Love, Peace of Conscience, Joy in the Holy Ghost, Increase of Grace, and Perseverance therein to the End.* This brings the Elect to the very Borders of the Promised Land. The next
 Remove.

Remove in his Way, is the Ford of *Jordan*, 11. *Temporal Death.*

This lands them on the Shore of the Hea- 12. *Eternal*
venly *Ganaan* of eternal Glory, to the Praise of God's free and eternal Love, in and thro' the Merits and Intercession of the Redeemer. I could dwell on this delightful Theme; therefore I hope you will excuse the Length of this Letter, from your's, &c.

London, June 9, 1750.

C. L.

S. I. R,

I Received your's, which tho' long, as it contained much Matter, may be well born with; I shall make no Remarks, till you have given me the Series of Causes and Effects, which ends in eternal Damnation.

London, June 20, 1750.

T. W.

S. I. R,

I Shall endeavour to answer your last Request in the best Manner I can, and begin where the Decree of Election left the Elect, who I have lodged in eternal Glory. But to the other, the fatal Decree 7. *Decree of Reprobation.*

O, the wonderful Difference made!

To those free and unmerited Love; to these God's just Hatred of the Vessels of Wrath, which makes the eighth Link of the Chain. 8. *God's hating the Reprobate.*

This is productive of either no Calling, or 9. *No Calling, a Calling which is designed, and will prove or an ineffectual Calling.* See Confession of Faith, Ch. iii. Sect. 7. *The rest of Mankind; that is, the Reprobate, God was pleased according to the unsearchable Council of his own Will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth Mercy as he pleaseth, for the Glory of his sovereign Power over his Creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to Dishonour and Wrath for their Sin, to the Praise of his glorious Justice.* You see here the Effects of God's eternal Decree of Reprobation. Again, in the Larger Catechism, *All the Elect, and they only, are effectually called; all the others may be, and often are, not always outwardly called by the Ministry of the Word, and have some common Operations of the Spirit, who for their wilful Neglect and Contempt of Grace offered*

to them, being justly left to their Unbelief, do never, nor ever can, truly come to Jesus Christ.

10. *Ignorance of Mind.—Hardness of Heart.—Reprobate Sense.—Greediness in Sin generally, tho' in some, a Yielding to God's Call, but always followed by a Relapse.*

The next Stage the Reprobates arrive at in their Way to inevitable Perdition, is, —

[See the Margin.]

The Reprobate passes by some of these Roads, which all center in Fulness of Sin.

11. *Fulness of Sin.*

This Stage of the Reprobate is that which immediately precedes temporal Death; for the

Sinner lives to no better Purpose than to compleat his Iniquities, which, when full, he is cut off. As God by the determinate Counsel of his own Will, hath from Eternity ordained the End, so also the Means: Then he shall arrive at the next Stage, Temporal Death.

12. *Temporal Death.*

This is the Gate, which being shut, separates the Reprobate from all the Means of Grace, which in his Life-time he seemed to enjoy in common with others, and sets him

before God in the 13th Stage, the last Judgment, there to hear his final Doom: *Go ye Cursed into ever-*

13. *Last Judgment.*

lasting Fire prepared for the Devil and his Angels. Prepared not a while ago, or since the Sinner became the actual Transgressor of the Laws of God; not because it was by God foreknown, he would be a Sinner in Time; no, prepared before the Foundation of the World was laid; 'twas in Eternity decreed, that such a determinate Number, and those individual Persons should be excluded from all effectual Means of Grace, and Reconciliation with God.

Nothing now remains but to lodge the Reprobate at his own Place, where will be Weeping, Wailing, and Gnashing of Teeth for ever. The Elect shall heighten their Songs to God, and the Lamb in Praise of Redeeming Love towards them, while they behold the just Judgment of God executed with Rigour on the Reprobate, who in the Ruins of the Fall were distinguished for Damnation, while by free electing Grace they were chosen as Vessels of Mercy.

London,

I am, S I R, Yours, &c.

June 29, 1750.

C. L.

S I R,

S I R,

IN your last I received your Account of the Order of Causes of Damnation, from the secret Counsel of God's Decree, in Eternity, to the final Execution of the last Sentence. As to the Fitness of such an Order from an inevitable Decree of God, I shall have an Occasion to enquire; but first desire you would let me see more of your Authorities for this Part of your System of Divinity

Exon,
July 8, 1750.

I am, S I R, &c.

T. W.

S I R,

IN Compliance with your Desire, I send you more of our Authorities for this great and glorious Truth, which exalteth the Lord, and debaseth the Creature.

I shall next quote Confession of Faith, Chap. v. Sect. 4. *The almighty Power, unsearchable Wisdom, and infinite Goodness of God, so far extendeth itself even to the first Fall, and all other Sins of Angels and Men, and that not by a bare Permission, but such as hath joined with it a most wise and powerful Bonding, and otherwise ordering and governing of them in a manifold Dispensation to his own holy Ends; yet so, as the Sinfulness thereof proceedeth only from the Creature, and not from God, who being most holy and righteous, neither is, nor can be, the Author of Sin.* Here you see the Character of God vindicated against any Charge of being the Author of Sin, tho' it is an Effect of his eternal Decree.

Again, Sect. 6. *As for those wicked and ungodly Men, whom God, as a righteous Judge, for former Sins doth blind and harden, from them he not only withholdeth his Grace, whereby they might have been enlightened in their Understandings, and wrought upon in their Hearts; but sometimes also withdraweth the Gifts which they had, and exposeth them to such Objects as their Corruption makes Occasions of Sin; and withal gives them over to their own Lusts, the Temptations of the World, and the Power of Satan; whereby it comes to pass that they harden themselves, even under those Means which God useth for the Softening of others.* You see God takes away nothing but his own, viz. the Common Grace, which he had for a Time lent them; and leaves them to the Power of Satan and their own Lusts.

Again, Chap. x. Sect. 4. Others not elected, altho' they may be called by Ministry of the Word, and may have some common Operations of the Spirit, yet they never come unto Christ, and therefore cannot be saved; much less can Men not professing the Christian Religion be saved, in any other Way whatsoever, be they never so diligent to frame their Lives according to the Law of Nature, and the Law of that Religion they do profess; and to assert and maintain that they may, is pernicious and to be detested. This is Part of the Evidence from the Assembly's Confession of Faith, set forth by the Command of the Lords and Commons, 1643.

Next I shall offer you Authorities from the Reverend and Holy Archbishop *Usher*, who, in his Body of Divinity, after he answered the Question, *What is Reprobation?* and asserted that Sin is not the Cause of Reprobation; he asks, *Is there no Cause than of Reprobation in the Reprobate?* Answer, None at all, in that they, rather than others, are passed by of God; that is, wholly from the unsearchable Depth of God's free Will and good Pleasure.

He asks again, *But is not God unjust in reprobating some Men, and electing others, when all were alike?* Answer, No, for he was bound to none; and to shew his Freedom and Power over his Creatures, he disposeth of them as he will for his Glory. As the Potter is not unjust in making of the same Clay sundry Vessels, some to Honour, and some to Dishonour.

Again he asks, *How can it be shewed, out of the Scriptures, that God hath a Hand, whereby he governeth even the Transgressor against his holy Will?*

Answer, 1. God did send Joseph into Egypt, &c.

2. God hardened Pharaoh's Heart.

3. God commanded Shimei to curse David.

4. God moved David to number the People.

5. 'Twas of God that Rehoboam hearkened not to the People.

6. The Devil was bidden of God to be a Lying Spirit in the Mouths of the false Prophets.

7. God mingled among them the Spirit of Error.

8. The Lord gave Jacob for a Spoil to the Robbers. *Isaiah xlii. 24.*

9. Why hast thou made us to err out of thy Way, and hardened our Hearts from thy Fear? *Isaiah lxiii. 17.*

10. God gave them up to vile Affections. *Rom. i. 26.*

11. God sent them strong Delusions. *2 Thessalonians ii. 11.*
And

And, to be content with one more Testimony among many, let us consider how the most vile and horrible Act that ever was done upon the Face of the Earth, the Lord God is said to have wrought most holily; for as Judas, the Jews, and Pilate, are all said to have given Christ to Death, so the Father and Christ are said to have done the same, and that in the same Words; the Manner and Purpose are divers.

He asks again, Doth not God then suffer such Things to be done?

Answer, *He suffereth indeed, yet this is not an idle Permission, as some imagine, but joined with a very active Doing or Work of God, as in the Crucifying of Christ, it is said, that they did nothing but that which the Hand of God had determined before. Acts ii. 23.—iii. 18.—iv. 28. God is not only a bare Permitter of the evil Works, but a powerful Governor of them to his Glory, and an Effecter also of it, so far as it hath any Good in it.*

Again he says, Declare how God can have a Hand in these Things, and yet be free from Sin?

Answer, *He is a cunning Workman, who, with an ill Tool, will work cunningly; and, as a most excellent Apothecary maketh a Medicine of the Mixture of Poison in it, which yet is not poisonous, but rather medicinal; so the Lord, in guiding and managing the Poison of Sin, draweth Treacle from the Sins of Men, &c. Thus much from that excellent Author Archbishop Usher.*

I shall next recommend the 9th Chapter of the *Romans* to your serious Consideration, and give you the Comment of an Author or two on some Part of it.

Mr. *Wilson*, in his Dialogue on this Chapter, asks, What is the End or final Cause of Election? Answer, *The utmost End is the Praise of his free Grace; hence the Elect are called the Vessels of Mercy. The nearest Cause is Man's Salvation to obtain eternal Life; and the final Cause of Reprobation is the Praise of his Justice, and the Destruction of Sinners. This is his Observation on Verse the 11th.*

Eluathan Parr, on the same Verse, observes, *The Promises are the same propounded to all; but they are in the Counsel of God's good Pleasure and Purpose, made effectual only to the Elect.*

So again the same Author on Verse the 13th, *The End of Preaching is not to make of Reprobates Elect: No, surely, that would be to cross the eternal Decree of God, and*
 prove

prove him to be a changeable Being, but that the Elect should thereby attain the fore-purposed and promised Salvation.

The same Author on Verse the 16th. *A Carpenter having divers Trees before him of like Bigness, marks one to be sawn into Boards, another into Spars, &c. If we ask him why he lines out one Tree thus, and another thus? he will answer, that he means to employ one of them for Timber for the Roof, another for other Uses in the Building: But if you ask him, why he chose this rather than another, all being of like Goodness? he will judge the Question unreasonable, and alledge his Will: So beyond the Will of God, no Enquiry must be made of the Cause of the Election or Reprobation of Men.*

The same Author on the 18th Verse. *All the Effects of the Divine Will are good; but Election and Reprobation are Effects of the Divine Will; therefore, &c.*

Or thus:

He that by an absolute Right doth what he will, dealeth not unjustly. But God by an absolute Right electeth some, and overpasseth others; therefore, &c.

The same Author on Verse 19th *Thou wilt say unto me, why doth he yet find Fault? For who hath resisted his Will? So on to the End of the 23d Verse; on all which he says, His secret Will is the Will of his good Pleasure, whereby he determineth of Things he will do. His Revealed Will is that which is manifested in his Word, commanding Things to be done by us. His Revealed Will is refused by the Wicked; his secret Will cannot be resisted of any ——— If his Will be the Cause of Reprobation, then he hath no Reason to complain, because his Will cannot be resisted. Lower, he saith, — As if he should say; Thou, O Man! thou Piece of Clay! thou Dirt of the Street! What art thou, base vile Wretch, dost thou reply against God? Paul seems to speak in some Heat; his Affections and Holy Zeal being stirred at the Malepertness of the Caviller.*

Again, *Shall the Wood quarrel with the Carpenter? The Iron with the Smith? The Clay with the Potter?*

This last is Paul's Similitude, taken out of Esay xlv. 9. and by Proportion teacheth, that Man is not to quarrel with God about his Predestination.

Shall the Pot say to the Potter, why hast thou made me of this Fashion?

It is the worst Fashion. A Man without Hands might have made as good a one. Much less may Man, who is but a Pot-sheard,

sheard, argue the Case with God, complaining of his Decree ; for there is more Difference between us and God, than between the Pot and the Potter, tho' an Emperor were a Potter, and the Pot ever so base.

Again, The Reason is from the less. The Clay may not expostulate with the Potter, having Power of the same Lump to make one Vessel to Honour, and another to Dishonour. Much more hath God Power of the same damned Lump, to harden some, and to have Mercy on other some.

Again, The Potter made not his Clay, but both Potter and Clay are made by God ; therefore his Right is more.

Objection. Tho' the Pot may not plead with the Potter, yet the Potter hath no Reason to be angry with his Pot, if it remain no otherwise than he made it.

Answer. The Potter is not angry with his Pot for the Fashion in which he made it, but for the Soil which it hath gathered since he made it. So, if we had remained as we were at first created, God would not have been angry with us ; but we are corrupted, and therefore he may justly be offended.

Again, Among the Multitude of Infants which die, some are elected, some reprobated. What is the Reason ? If you say Original Sin, the whole Number is guilty. If you consider personal Innocency, the whole Sum is without Fault. Human Wisdom and Righteousness find not what to say, but Divine Grace finds whom to elect ; the Reason is hid, but the Guilt is manifest.

Again, The Elect and Reprobate, are Vessels from the same Lump. They serve for one general Use, that is God's Glory ; their main Difference is, the Reprobate are Vessels of Wrath unto Damnation ; the Elect Vessels of Mercy unto Salvation, and both for the Glory of God.

The same Author farther says, We preach Mercy ; if thou be a Reprobate, it is not meant to thee. We preach Wrath : if thou be an Elect, this is not meant to thee, but to the Reprobate. It may be, that when Mercy is preaching and pouring down, the Reprobate looks after it, and thinks to have it, but he deceives himself. When a Father is cutting Bread among his Children, their little Eyes are upon every Piece that is cut. It may be also the Dog stands by (Reprobates may not grudge at the Comparison, whose State is worse than the Dogs) The Dog it may be stands by, and gapes for the Bread, but the

the Father gives to the Dog also, but it is a Cudgel or Whip, and spurns him from him. So Mercy is the Childrens Bread, it hangs not for the Reprobate's Tooth.

Thus I have fully proved my Point from Scripture, Reason, and the best of human Authority; and now wait for your Answer, as I well know some Kind of Argument may be formed against the plainest Truth in Nature or Revelation.

I am, Sir, Your's,

London, July 17, 1750.

C. L.

S I R,

I Am obliged to you for the great Pains you have taken, in order to convince me of what you think Truth; but its not being so satisfactory to me, arises from our different Perceptions; therefore it becomes us to pity, and not to blame each other.

The enquiring Part of Mankind have Time immemorial been divided, concerning absolute Fate, and Free Agency. You will not expect from me an absolute Determination on the Side of the Question opposite to yours. The more probable Opinion on the fair State of the Controversy, ought to determine, or at least incline us toward an Assent, and induce us to speak and act as we would do, if the Point could be demonstrated. If the Honour of God, and the apparent Justice and Regularity of his Conduct, as a wise and good Governor of the World, shall appear more on one Side of the Question than the other, that Side must needs claim a greater Degree of Assent.

If there should appear Texts of Scripture, which seem to oppose or confirm each Side, we must form our Judgment of the Case by those which shall give most Honour to the Almighty, and most contribute to the Peace and Happiness of Men, and which shall present to our Reason a more just View of Things.

I shall first examine by the Reason and Fitness of Things, as unassisted by Revelation, and then compare the Authorities of Scripture one with another, then weigh each in the Balance of Reason; for both Sides of contrary Positions cannot be true.

First,

First, Examine by Reason, unassisted by Revelation. The first Step in the Enquiry after True Religion, is to gain some proper Notion of God. As the Apprehensions of Men are of that great Object, so will they frame their Systems of Creed and Worship. Suppose any Number of Men of good natural Parts, arrived at an Age capable of Reasoning, who had never heard of a supreme Maker and Governor of the World; yet, from the Appearances of Nature, and the Order and Harmony of Things, were drawn to conclude that some powerful Being made and upheld the wonderful Frame. When they had thus reasoned themselves into the Belief of a God, whose Wisdom and Power was apparent from his Works, it is easy to think they could not be long e'er they attributed to him Goodness also; and that Wisdom, Power, and Goodness in God, bears some Analogy to those Qualities in human Nature. If so, we cannot, without a tacit Reproach, believe God to have conducted himself towards his Creatures in such a Manner, as the wisest and best of Men would not have done, in a Case in any Degree similar to these, over whom they have Preheminence. For a Man to justify his great Severity by his uncontrollable Power, is what constitutes the abhorred Character of a Tyrant.

Give me Leave to examine your Sense of some Texts of Scripture, especially in the Ninth Chapter of the *Romans*, by Reason, and see what an amiable Character will be exhibited of the Lord of all Things. What Heart but must bleed for poor *Esau*, of whom the History has not given a bad Character? but bound by the Adamantine Chain of God's eternal Decree. See him most cruelly, falsely, and unjustly abused by his own Flesh and Blood, his Mother and Brother, by Fraud and notorious Lies, in which the solemn Name of God is abused to cover the Deceit. The poor honest Heart, in the most momentous Affairs of this Life, vilely injured, and damn'd when he was dead, because his Maker, before he was born, hated him; *for the Children being not yet born, neither having done Good or Evil, that the Purpose of God according to Election might stand, not of Works, but of him that calleth; it was said unto her, the Elder shall serve the younger: As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.* And all this, that the Glory of God's Severity might shine forth in most terrible Splendor. The Reason given in

Verse 15. *For I will have Mercy on whom I will have Mercy, &c. So then it is not of him that willeth, or of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth Mercy.*

However bad *Pharaoh* might have been, 'twas as to him unavoidable. *Even for this same Purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my Power in thee, and that my Name might be declared throughout all the Earth. Therefore, or by this, 'tis plain, he hath Mercy on whom he will have Mercy, and whom he will he hardneth.* So fond (if I may be allowed the Expression) is the God of all Grace represented, of shewing his most severe Vengeance !

As to the Instance of the Potter, let me examine the Fitness of the Allusion to the Conclusion, in your Sense of the Words. *Shall the Thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou formed me thus ? Hath not the Potter Power over the Clay of the same Lump, to make one Vessel to Honour, and another to Dishonour ?* Yes surely, he has, as it shall please him, a Right out of the same Sod to make a Piss-pot and a Punch-bowl ; what is it to the inanimate Clay to what Use it shall be put ? But the Inference drawn from the Premises is unnatural and absurd, in the Sense you put upon the Words. What ! shall we believe our God is so earnest to glorify his Wrath, as to make the infinitely greatest Part of his rational Creatures eternally miserable, to let a few see how wretched he can make the rest of the Works of his Hands ? Should a Potter make his Ware ill, with Design to shew that he could make them so, and break them to Pieces, to shew he had a Power over his Workmanship, his Neighbours must needs think him a silly humourous Potter, and his Time foolishly spent. But were his Pots as sensible of Pain from his ill Usage of them, as the animal and rational Part of the Creation are sensible of Ill-usage, he would add to the foolish Part of his Character, that of being abominably cruel.

I hope the Words of the Apostle will bear an Interpretation very different from yours, or I humbly conceive they will not be imposed on the Christian World as Part of the Oracles of the God of Justice, Truth and Mercy.

The Supposition of a future State of Rewards and Punishments, implies Freedom in rewardable and punishable Beings.

I am

I am now to shew that the Tenor of the Sacred Writings is against the Sense you put on the Words of St. Paul.

The Scriptures, in one Part, must needs be the best Rule of the Interpretation of others, and on your own Principles are not to clash; but such seeming Contradiction must be set to the Account of our own Want of better Information. On your Side of the Question is nothing but arbitrary Authority, in Opposition to the Common Sense of Mankind, and on mine, a Concurrence with the Notions Men have of Truth, Goodness, and the most exalted Justice.

In numberless Places God is represented as immediately, and, by his Messengers, proposing Terms with his Creatures; which would be absurd, if, from Eternity, they had been predestinated. The End, and the whole Series of Means to that End, all fixed by the eternal Decree of God. If that Doctrine were true, what a vast Expence of Time and Labour has been lost in all the Ages through which the Church of God has existed, in order to prevail on Men to turn to God and live, when 'twas fore-ordained that they should inevitably be damned? But I presume I shall make the contrary appear; in order to which, I shall quote some Texts of Scripture, just contrary to the Sense you put on some others. Ezekiel xxxiii. ii. *Say unto them, as I live, saith the Lord God, I have no Pleasure in the Death of the Wicked, but that the Wicked turn from his Way and live: Turn ye, turn ye from your evil Ways; for why will ye die, O House of Israel?* On which Words the noted Mr. Baxter observes,

1.] It is the unchangeable Law of God, that the Wicked must turn or die.

2.] It is the Promise of God, that the Wicked shall live, if they will but turn.

3.] God takes Pleasure in Man's Conversion and Salvation, but not in their Death and Damnation.

4.] This is a most certain Truth, which, because God would not have Men to question, he hath confirmed it to them solemnly by his Oath.

5.] The Lord doth redouble his Commands and Persuasions to the Wicked to turn.

6.] The Lord condescends to reason the Case with them, and asketh the Wicked, *why they will die.*

7.] If, after all this, the Wicked will not return, it is not long of God that they perish, but because of themselves; their own Wilfulness is the Cause of their Damnation; they therefore die, because they will die.— If this is not true, what a solemn Farce is all this? If it is so, how directly contrary to your Sense of *Romans* the 9th, and some other Places?

Can a greater Insult be offered the Wretched than to intreat, beseech, threaten, promise, &c. those who have by the Intreator been incapacitated for Performance, and yet severely punished for not doing what was impossible for them to do? Is not this like breaking Persons Legs, plucking out their Eyes, intoxicating their Brains, and yet command them to walk, see, and be serious? To beseech, pray, promise, threaten, and yet to swear 'tis not the Desire of the Inflictor, that they should remain in the State into which he has irremedilessly thrown them. If the poor unhappy Patients were to be thus mocked by the injurious Sovereign, and afterwards be fully re-paid for the Suffering under the tragic Part they were forced to act, would be something in their Favour; but, after all, according to your Sense of some Texts of Scripture, they must be exquisitely and eternally punished, for being what an eternal Decree has made them; viz. lame, blind, and mad.

O ye Blasphemers! are these the Honours ye bestow on the Lord of all the Earth, whose tender Mercies are over ALL his Works?

O my Soul! come not thou into their Secret; unto their Assembly, mine Honour, be not thou united! Gen. xlix. 6.

I having exceeded the ordinary Bounds of a Letter, shall only quote a few more of the many Texts of Scripture, wherein it is expressed, or fairly implied, that every one has Common Powers given him, by which he may attain so high a Pitch of Virtue, which will be rewarded by the Judge of all the Earth, Psalm lxxxi. 13. *O that my People had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my Ways!*

Deut. v. 29. *O that there were such an Heart in them,—that it might be well with them and their Children for ever!*

Micah vi. and the nine first Verses, in which are exceeding strong Expostulations, &c. And is all this for no other Purpose than to inhance the Crime and Punishment of the unhappy Reprobates? *Isaiah* lv. 1, 2, 3,—6—7. *Prov.* i. and

and twenty first Verses. *Jeremiah* iii. 11, 12, 13, 23. *Matt.*
xxiii. 37. *Ezek.* xyiii. 21, to the End of the Chapter.

Exon, I am, Yours,
July 25, 1750. T. W.

S I R,

AS there will be no End of Cavils, while Men are setting up Reason against Revelation, and will appear wise above what is written, I desire we may close our Correspondence on the Subject of Religion, and shall leave with you a few Texts for your serious Perusal.

When our Blessed Lord was on the Point of offering himself a Sacrifice for the Sins of the Elect, and them only, he says to the Father, *John* xvii. 6, 9. *I have manifested thy Name unto the Men which thou gavest me out of the World; I pray for them, I pray not for the World.* Can any Thing be more expressive of peculiar Love to them, and to them only?

So, *Mark* iv. 11. *And he said unto them, unto you it is given to know the Mystery of the Kingdom of God, but to them that are without: All these Things are done in Parables, that seeing they may see, and not perceive, &c.*

You see how cautious our Lord was, not to deliver himself in Terms which could have been by the Multitude understood. So, *Luke* viii. 10. to the same Purpose. *2 Cor.* iv. 3. *If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.*—These two Places explain each other, and prove that those Means of Grace, effectual to the Elect, are of no Use to the Reprobate, and all as the Consequence of the absolute Decree of God, who has a Right to dispose of his Creatures as he pleases. I shall earnestly recommend you before the Throne of Grace; peradventure the Lord may be gracious; if not, I must leave you to follow your own Delusions. If the Decree is passed, I must acquiesce, and say, *He that is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still.*

I am, Dear Sir,
Your Compassionate Friend,

London,
August 2, 1750.

C. L.

S I R,

S I R,

I Received the Favour of your last, which, as expressive of Kindness and Concern for my Welfare, is very acceptable to me; tho' it appears inconsistent with itself, and contrary to the Honour of God.

I cannot, on your own Principles, think myself obliged to you, for that kind Disposition which you express, because whatsoever comes to pass in Time, was, you say, decreed from Eternity; You to be a Vessel of Mercy, secure in the Light of Grace; I, as far as to you appears, an Infidel, shut up under Darkness, till I shall be called forth to close my tragic Scene to God's Glory, in the Sentence and Execution of Eternal Damnation: In short, if I am not elect, and if you are elect, I cannot be saved, nor you damned, our Minds being severally over-ruled to answer the Purpose of God's Decree concerning us.

But I hope better Things, and am,

Exon,
August 12, 1750.

Yours, &c.

T. W.

Farewell.

F I N I S.

